IN THE CLAIMS

The text of all pending claims, (including withdrawn claims) is set forth below. Cancelled and not entered claims are indicated with claim number and status only. The claims as listed below show added text with underlining and deleted text with ~~strikethrough~~. The status of each claim is indicated with one of (original), (currently amended), (cancelled), (withdrawn), (new), (previously presented), or (not entered).

1. (currently amended) A method of sorting items of mail by means of sorting machines with sorting endpoints, which comprise sorting bins (14) or replaceable containers (16), in multiple sorting passes, the surface of the item of mail with ~~the~~ a distribution address being recorded and ~~the latter~~ read during each first sorting pass,

characterized in that

- during the first sorting pass, characteristic features of the item of mail ~~and~~/or features of the address are additionally determined for each item of mail as a defined character feature set of features for distinguishing at least n items of mail, where n = ~~the~~ a maximum multiple delivery ~~rate to be expected~~,
- when a defined level is reached in each sorting endpoint, the container (16) is changed or the sorting bin (14) is emptied and the items of mail emptied out are stored temporarily in containers (16) while maintaining ~~their~~ the items of mail order, the containers (16) being identified at least with ~~the~~ a sorting endpoint number,
- for each item of mail, ~~the~~ an order of reading ~~the~~ a distribution address, the associated sorting endpoint number and/or the number of the container (16) in which the item of mail is stored in this sorting pass, ~~the~~ a distribution code determined from the address read and ~~the~~ a characteristic feature set are stored in a database (10),
- in ~~the~~ a second and each further sorting pass, the items of mail from each container (16) from the respective previous sorting pass are put into this or another sorting machine in the order

in which ~~they~~ the items of mail were stored in the container (16), ~~the~~ an associated endpoint or container number is reported to ~~the~~ a sorting machine and therefore the database section relevant to the respective container (16) is determined, the data in each database section being ordered in accordance with the order of reading the distribution address, for each item of mail the defined characteristic feature set is determined, with the aid of which the respective distribution code is then determined, by the characteristic feature set of ~~the~~ a first item of mail being compared with n characteristic feature sets stored one after another in this database section, beginning with the feature set of the first item of mail, and, if there is agreement within a defined range, the associated stored distribution code being assigned to the first item of mail, by the characteristic feature set of the second item of mail being compared with n characteristic feature sets stored one after another in this database section, beginning with the feature set of the second item of mail, and, if there is agreement, the stored distribution code for ~~this~~ the feature set being assigned to the second item of mail, and ~~this procedure~~ the method of sorting items is repeated until the feature sets of all the items of mail supplied have been compared with the associated stored feature sets.

2. (currently amended) The method as claimed in claim 1, characterized in that if ~~the~~ an order of the containers (16) belonging to a sorting endpoint has not been identified, in order to detect the transition from one container (16) to ~~the~~ an other, in addition ~~the~~ a respective last item of mail before or ~~the~~ a first item of mail after each sorting endpoint emptying is identified in the database (10), and the feature set of the first item of mail of each container (16) of one sorting endpoint in each case is compared with the first n feature sets of the database sections associated with this sorting endpoint but not yet processed in this sorting pass until agreement, and therefore the database section associated with the items of mail in this container (16), have been determined.

3. (currently amended) The method as claimed in claim 1, characterized in that the contents of the database

sections are stored in memories which are fitted to ~~the~~ relevant containers (16) and which can be written to and read from, said memories being read out before the items of mail are put into the sorting machines for the second and further sorting passes and being put into the control systems of ~~these~~ sorting machines.

4. (currently amended) The method as claimed in claim 1, characterized in that ~~the~~ relevant database contents are transmitted electronically to the sorting machines carrying out the second and further sorting passes.

5. (cancelled).

6. (currently amended) The method as claimed in claim 1, characterized in that the contents of ~~the~~ database sections are stored in memories which are fitted to ~~the~~ relevant containers (16) and which can be written to and read from, said memories being read out before the items of mail are put into the sorting machines for the second and further sorting passes and being put into the control systems of ~~these~~ sorting machines.

7. (currently amended) The method as claimed in claim 1, characterized in that the relevant database contents are transmitted electronically to the sorting machines carrying out the second and further sorting passes.

8. (new) A method of sorting items of mail by means of sorting machines with sorting endpoints, which comprise sorting bins (14) or replaceable containers (16), in multiple sorting passes, the surface of the item of mail with a distribution address being recorded and read during

each first sorting pass,

characterized in that

- during the first sorting pass, characteristic features of the item of mail and features of the address are additionally determined for each item of mail as a set of features for distinguishing at least n items of mail, where n = a maximum multiple delivery rate,
- when a defined level is reached in each sorting endpoint, the container (16) is changed or the sorting bin (14) is emptied and the items of mail emptied out are stored temporarily in containers (16) while maintaining the items of mail order, the containers (16) being identified at least with a sorting endpoint number,
- for each item of mail, an order of reading a distribution address, the associated sorting endpoint number and/or the number of the container (16) in which the item of mail is stored in this sorting pass, a distribution code determined from the address read and a characteristic feature set are stored in a database (10),
- in a second and each further sorting pass, the items of mail from each container (16) from the respective previous sorting pass are put into this or another sorting machine in the order in which the items of mail were stored in the container (16), an associated endpoint or container number is reported to a sorting machine and therefore the database section relevant to the respective container (16) is determined, the data in each database section being ordered in accordance with the order of reading the distribution address, for each item of mail the defined characteristic feature set is determined, with the aid of which the respective distribution code is then determined, by the characteristic feature set of a first item of mail being compared with n characteristic feature sets stored one after another in this database section, beginning with the feature set of the first item of mail, and, if there is agreement within a defined range, the associated stored distribution code being assigned to the first item of mail, by the characteristic feature set of the second item of mail being compared with n characteristic feature sets stored one after another in this database section, beginning with the feature set of the second item of

mail, and, if there is agreement, the stored distribution code for the feature set being assigned to the second item of mail, and the method of sorting items is repeated until the feature sets of all the items of mail supplied have been compared with the associated stored feature sets.

9. (new) The method as claimed in claim 1, characterized in that if an order of the containers (16) belonging to a sorting endpoint has not been identified, in order to detect the transition from one container (16) to an other, in addition a respective last item of mail before or a first item of mail after each sorting endpoint emptying is identified in the database (10), and the feature set of the first item of mail of each container (16) of one sorting endpoint in each case is compared with the first n feature sets of the database sections associated with this sorting endpoint but not yet processed in this sorting pass until agreement, and therefore the database section associated with the items of mail in this container (16), have been determined.

10. (new) The method as claimed in claim 1, characterized in that the contents of the database

sections are stored in memories which are fitted to relevant containers (16) and which can be written to and read from, said memories being read out before the items of mail are put into the sorting machines for the second and further sorting passes and being put into the control systems of sorting machines.

11. (new) The method as claimed in claim 1, characterized in that relevant database contents are transmitted electronically to the sorting machines carrying out the second and further sorting passes.

12. (new) The method as claimed in claim 1, characterized in that the contents of database sections are stored in memories which are fitted to relevant containers (16) and which can be written to and read from, said memories being read out before the items of mail are put into the

sorting machines for the second and further sorting passes and being put into the control systems of sorting machines.

13. (new) The method as claimed in claim 1, characterized in that relevant database contents are transmitted electronically to the sorting machines carrying out the second and further sorting passes.